Open Government Implementation Self-Evaluation for the US Environmental Protection Agency

As of July 20, 2011

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has ranked in the top tier of Federal organizations meeting OpenGov principles, attaining an all "Green" status early in the process and having the distinction of being awarded two of the four Leading Practices Awards by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Last year, EPA was recognized with awards for "Participation and Collaboration" and the "Flagship Initiative." Since that time we continue to strive for excellence and have significant achievements in the remaining two areas: "Leadership, Governance, and Culture Change" and "Transparency" as described in this self-evaluation. Leading the way in bringing data to the public, two EPA staffers were recognized by the White House as "Champions of Change" for their efforts to publish more datasets and timely apps on Data.gov.

When it comes to data, EPA has been publishing data via the internet for many years and continues to seek new and more accessible ways to provide information to the public (such as widgets and mobile apps). The Agency was an early and frequent contributor to Data.gov, with over 2000 datasets/tools/geodata published. EPA also provides the public an inventory of EPA Data.gov holdings that supplies descriptive information and metadata to help stakeholders understand our data. And to continue our stretch into new technology and territory, we are beginning to transform highly-used and requested datasets (such as the Facility Registry System and Substance Registry System) into Linked Data (LD) form. LD, self-describing data that can be easily discovered and linked by machine, is part of the emerging Semantic Web discipline pioneered in academic circles.

In the area of Data Management, EPA has integrated OpenGov at the executive level with policy review and decisions achieved through the cross-Agency Quality Information Council. The Agency has also developed a robust, iterative Strategic Data Action Plan (SDAP) to guide Agency staff at all levels in helping expand and improve the data EPA publicly publishes. And most recently, EPA announced the "Apps for the Environment" Challenge where we are asking developers to find new and innovative uses for EPA data. Submissions and winners will be highlighted on EPA's website to continue to inspire and encourage innovation in providing and consuming environmental data.

Summary of Ratings

Rating	Category
Green	Plan Content/Formulation
Green	Transparency
Green	Participation
Green	Collaboration
Green	Flagship Initiative
Green	**Overall Rating**

Implementation Task	Comment	(Completed, In Progress, Not Completed)
Section 1 (Publish Government Information Online)		
Agencies shall publish information online and preserve and maintain electronic information.	EPA has a long history of providing information via EPA.gov and was an early and active publisher to Data.gov and remains one of the largest contributors. Currently the Agency is restructuring the EPA.gov website to improve usability, reduce redundancy, and eliminate outdated information.	Completed (And Ongoing)
To the extent practicable and subject to valid restrictions, Agency is publishing information online in an open format that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed, and searched by commonly used web search applications.	EPA provides data and information to the public via EPA.gov and Data.gov in many open formats. In fact in EPA's Strategic Data Action Plan (SDAP), the Agency provides data owners a blueprint for making data more progressively open with examples of the most open formats.	Completed (And Ongoing)
Agency is proactively using modern technology to disseminate useful information online.	The Agency is using a wide array of modern technology and social media to get the word out about EPA activities and make data available. For example, we use Facebook, Twitter, the Greenversations Blog, YouTube and other tools to reach the public. In addition to providing data in open formats, EPA also develops widgets and mobile apps to make data more accessible and consumable to the general public.	Completed (And Ongoing)
Agency is publishing online in an open format at least three high-value data sets and registering them via data.gov.	EPA has over 2000 datasets, tools, and geodata available to the public via Data.gov. Our Data.gov inventory indicates which components of the OMB high-value definition are met by the data resource.	Completed (And Ongoing)
Agency has created an open government website at www.[agency].gov/open	EPA's Open website has been up and operational since early in calendar year 2010. We are currently reviewing and updating the website to help the public more easily find information about EPA's OpenGov program.	Completed
The Agency's open government webpage incorporates a mechanism for the public to: (i) Give feedback on and assessment of the quality of published information; (ii) Provide input about which information to prioritize for publication; (iii) Provide input on the Agency's open government plan.	In addition to the feedback options on EPA's blog and IdeaScale (where EPA solicited public input when the OpenGov plans were first released), the Agency's developer's page supporting the "Apps for the Environment" Challenge now provides a forum for the public to suggest ideas, applications and discuss aspects of datasets of interest. EPA plans to continue to provide the public with this type of forum on an ongoing basis after the challenge is complete, as well as considering comments and suggestions directed to the Agency via Data.gov.	Completed (And Ongoing)
Agency publishes its annual Freedom of Information Act Report in an open format on its open government webpage.	The annual Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report is available from EPA.gov/open.	Completed
If Agency has a significant pending backlog of outstanding Freedom of Information requests, Agency is taking steps to reduce the backlog by ten percent each year.	The Agency reduced the FOIA backlog over 65% from FY06 to FY09 by revising procedures and processes, employing new tools, and collaborating across the Agency. The Agency's goal is that the number of new requests in a given year that remain outstanding (or overdue) be less than 10%.	Completed
Agency is complying with Presidential open government initiatives, such as data.gov, eRulemaking, IT Dashboard, Recovery.gov, and USAspending.gov.	EPA is fully compliant with all of these initiatives as indicated in the EPA OpenGov Plan. In fact the Agency is considered a leader and/or in the top 3 across the Government in meeting the objectives of these initiatives.	Completed
Section 2 (Improve the Quality of Government Information)		
Agency has a designated high level senior official accountable for the quality and objectivity of, and internal controls over, the Federal spending information publicly disseminated.	Our senior accountable official, Barbara Bennett, is the Agency's Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Ms. Bennett is named in this role both on the EPA.gov/open site and in EPA's OpenGov Plan.	Completed
Section 3 (Institutionalize a Culture of Open Government)		
Agency has published an open government plan. This plan should include:*		Completed
Transparency		
A strategic action plan that: (i) inventories agency high value information; (ii) fosters the public use of this information to increase public knowledge and promote public scrutiny of agency services; (iii) identifies high value information not yet available and establishes a reasonable timeline for publication in open format with specific target dates.	EPA has a Strategic Data Action Plan (SDAP) that addresses data accessibility and format issues in a phased and iterative manner. (i) EPA's Data.gov Inventory is available on the EPA Open site; (ii) Available EPA data is publicized both on Data.gov, Twitter, Facebook, Greenversations and EPA's website. The Agency is also promoting the "Apps for the Environment" Challenge to encourage the public to use EPA data in new ways; (iii) EPA is working on the next generation of the Data.gov inventory to identify the universe of data EPA maintains, the #/% available publicly, and the remaining #/% that can be made public (some data are restricted from release for confidentiality or other data sensitivity reasons).	Completed (and Ongoing)

Where Agency provides public information maintained in electronic format, a plan for timely publication of underlying data.	The Agency strives to make underlying data available when information is published. In fact as part of the SDAP, EPA data owners/providers are guided to make underlying data available when a document or other information is published.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Details as to how Agency is complying with transparency initiative guidance, such as data.gov, eRulemaking, IT Dashboard, Recovery.gov, and USAspending.gov.	EPA provides detail as to how these initiatives are being met in the EPA OpenGov Plan with changes noted in the Agency's OpenGov quarterly updates.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Details of proposed actions to be taken to inform the public about significant actions and business of Agency.	EPA actively publishes News Alerts via email, Twitter, and Facebook to inform the public of significant opportunities to participate in Agency processes and decision making.	Completed (and Ongoing)
A link to a publicly available website that shows how Agency is meetings its existing records management requirements.	Information about EPA's records management program (which includes approved record schedules and a description of how we meet record responsibilities) can be accessed at EPA.gov/records/.	Completed (and Ongoing)
A link to a website that includes: (i) a description of your staffing, organizational structure, and process for analyzing and responding to FOIA requests; (ii) an assessment of agency's capacity to analyze, coordinate, and respond to such requests in a timely manner; (iii) if Agency has significant backlog, milestones detailing how Agency will reduce backlog of outstanding FOIA requests by at least ten percent each year.	Information on EPA's FOIA program is available at EPA.gov/foia.	Completed (and Ongoing)
A link to a publicly available webpage where the public can learn about your Agency's declassification programs, learn how to access declassification materials, and provide input about what types of information should be prioritized for declassification, as appropriate.	EPA provides a link from EPA's Open page with detail regarding Agency declassification procedures EPA.gov/open/MandatoryDeclassificationReview_040610.pdf .	Completed
Participation		
Descriptions of and links to appropriate websites where the public can engage in existing participatory processes of Agency.	The public can find events to attend by visiting EPA.gov/open; viewing OpenGov Quarterly update reports; following EPA on Twitter, liking EPA's Facebook page and going to EPA's Greenversations blog.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Proposals for new feedback mechanisms (including using innovative tools and practices)	As part of EPA's Community Engagement Flagship Initiative, EPA is using several innovative tools such as Webinars, the Rulemaking Gateway, and Regulations.gov/Exchange to engage and involve regulated communities before a rule is drafted or proposed. This is a significant change in how regulatory agencies typically operate, involving the public much sooner in the decision-making process.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Collaboration		
Proposals to use technology platforms to improve collaboration among people within and outside the Agency.	EPA has successfully used YouTube for video contests and Regulations.gov/Exchange to reach out to and involve the public in advance of the formal rulemakings process. Other examples include webinars to increase public understanding of issues before guidance is developed (i.e. Chesapeake Bay Webinar Series, and now the Healthy Waters Blog) all of which offer examples within the Agency and to external parties on innovative ways to spread the word about EPA's mission.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Links to appropriate websites where the public can learn about existing collaboration efforts at Agency.	The public can find events to join by visiting the EPA.gov/open, viewing Quarterly OpenGov reports, following EPA on Twitter, liking EPA's Facebook page and going to EPA's Greenversations blog.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Innovative methods (such as prizes and competitions) in order to obtain ideas from and to increase collaboration with the private sector, non-profit, and academic communities.	The Agency has used YouTube as a tool for the public to submit videos to contests such as The Faces of the Grassroots Video Contest and the new "Apps for the Environment" Challenge to encourage innovative uses of EPA data. Video contests and the "Apps for the Environment" Challenge offer prizes to winners.	Completed (and Ongoing)
Flagship Initiative		
At least one specific, new initiative that Agency is currently implementing. (*See* the Open Government Directive for further guidance.)	The Agency has a suite of efforts completed or underway as part of our Community Engagement Flagship Initiative. We are tracking all the individual flagship efforts and reporting our progress in EPA's OpenGov Quarterly reports. The goal of our Flagship initiative is to inspire and encourage other Community Engagement outreach efforts within the Agency by capturing, sharing and leveraging lessons learned. "Healthy Waters" is a new initiative inspired by our initial Flagship efforts, and this effort will also be tracked in our quarterly reports.	Completed (and Ongoing)
*Guidance is taken directly from the Open Government Directive. Please refer to the Directive for detailed guidance.		